

Assessment of Aggressive Behavior and Assertiveness among Preparatory School Students

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Abstract: Aggression at schools has become an increasing concern to public health professionals. It's a multidimensional problem with biological, psychological, social, and environmental roots. Assertiveness is a kind of communication style that plays a key role in communicating successfully and effectively with others **Aim:** to assess aggressive behavior and assertiveness among preparatory school students. **Design:** A descriptive research design was used to conduct the current study. **Setting:** The study was conducted at Huda Sharawy preparatory school, El-Shaheed Ahmed Hamdy preparatory school for Girls, 25 January preparatory school and Mahatet El- kahraba preparatory school, Helwan, Cairo. **Sample:** A simple random sample of 176 students was selected from preparatory school students at 1st grade in El-Masara district during the academic year 2021-2022. **Tools:** Data were collected by using the following tools: Socio-demographic characteristics questionnaire, Aggression questionnaire and Assertiveness formative questionnaire **Results:** nearly two thirds of the studied students had mild level of aggression, while the minority of them had high level of aggression. Less than half of the studied students were nonassertive and had average assertiveness. **Conclusion:** Nearly two thirds of the studied students had mild level of aggression while the minority of them had a high level of aggression. Less than half of them were nonassertive and had average assertiveness. There was a statistically significant correlation between total aggression of studied students and their total assertiveness scores. **Recommendations:** Applying assertiveness training program to help students differentiate between assertion and aggression.

Keywords: *Aggressive Behavior, Assertiveness, Preparatory School Students*

Introduction

Preparatory school students are the greatest investment of any community and the main basis for its development. Preparatory school students constitute a significant and important sector of the population who are constantly growing and developing (*Abd El-Mohsen et al., 2018*). School students are the future youth and citizens of Egypt. They represent about 40% of the total Egyptian population (*Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), 2017*).

Aggression at schools has become an increasing concern to public health professionals, clinicians, policy makers, educators and the general public. It's a multidimensional problem with biological, psychological, social, and environmental roots (*Assaf, 2018*). Aggression is a complex phenomenon that may be exhibited in many different forms. It evokes much different impact on the students' life and causes unpredictable impairment to the social, emotional and psychological status. Aggressive behavior involves violent conduct intended to physically or verbally harm or hurt others. Aggression may be an impulsive defensive instinct, motivated by anger and frustration, from a threat or conflict or premeditated as part of planned attacks (*Martínez et al., 2021*).

In addition to, Students who are more aggressive than others often show negative or antisocial behaviors in later life, and their victims are more likely than others to show low self-esteem, low self-worth or other psychological problems such as anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts (*Lei, 2020*).

Assertiveness is a kind of communication style that plays a key role in communicating successfully and effectively with others, as a part of interpersonal and behavioral skills (*Azizi et al., 2020*). Assertiveness is a communication skill that can be taught. Also, supports creative thinking and effective communication (*Suripatty, 2021*).

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So, schools prioritize three critical and inter-related components of health which support social, emotional and behavioral aspects to promote overall students well-being. School nurses should help in developing and planning of aggression prevention and intervention programs within the schools (*Cardona, 2021*).

School psychiatric nurse acquire skills and briefing the principals, teachers, parents and students to the aggressive behavior, so that they can take roles in aggression prevention. The psychiatric nurse can seek collaborations and encounter with them in planning and implementing the various strategies related to their roles (*World Health Organization, 2019*). School psychiatric nurses have a significant role in collaborating with others to promote mental health and enhance protective factors for students. Also, collaborate with social workers, school counselors, and other clinicians to identify and refer students (*Pestaner, 2022*).

Significance of the Study

In the USA in the year 2000, more than 400 000 youths aged 10–19 years were injured as a result of violent acts. According to a study conducted in China about the aggression rates in a school-based sample, they were 24.4% for verbal type and 27.9% for physical type. In Egypt, 4.4% of students were attending at the emergency department at Alexandria students' hospital to seek medical care for injuries resulting from physical fighting. Moreover, studies in several countries indicated a prevalence of aggression 8–46% for regularly bullied children and 5–30% for regular active bullies (*Elmasry, 2016*).

From the researcher point of view, it's necessary for psychiatric nurses to monitor students' level of assertiveness, assess aggressive behavior among preparatory school students and evaluate the therapeutic or intended response and adverse or unintended effects of aggressive behaviors and its consequences. So, the aim of this study was to assess aggressive behavior and assertiveness among preparatory school students.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study was to assess aggressive behavior and assertiveness among preparatory school students through the following objectives:-

- Assessing aggressive behavior among preparatory school students.
- Assessing assertiveness among preparatory school students
- Assessing correlation between aggressive behavior and assertiveness among preparatory school students.

Research questions:

- What is the level of aggressive behavior among preparatory school students?
- What is the level of assertiveness among preparatory school students
- Is there a correlation between aggressive behavior and assertiveness among preparatory school students?

The subjects and methods of this study were portrayed under the four main designs as follows:

I. Technical design:

The technical design included research design, setting, subjects and tools of data collection.

Research design:

A descriptive research design was used to conduct the current study.

Setting:

The study was conducted at Huda Sharawy preparatory school which located at Hadayek Helwan, Helwan, Cairo and includes 160 students at 1st grade divided into 4 classes, El-Shaheed Ahmed Hamdy preparatory school for Girls which located at Hadayek Helwan, Helwan, Cairo and includes 180 students at 1st grade divided into 4 classes, 25 January preparatory school which located at Masarah, Helwan, Cairo and includes 140 students at 1st grade divided into 3 classes and Mahatet El- kahraba preparatory school which located at Electricity residences, Helwan, Cairo and includes 175 students at 1st grade divided into 4 classes. Schools were selected randomly from 11 preparatory schools in El-Masara district.

Subjects:

A simple random sample of 176 students was selected from 1760 preparatory school students at 1st grade in El-Masara district during the academic year 2021-2022. Study sample were divided into 4 groups each group represents one class at school. The researcher randomly selected four schools by using numbers which was written in a closed paper and assigned to each school. Then the researcher closed eyes and randomly picked up a subset of four numbers which represent four schools from 11 schools in El-Masara district. So, the study sample included 40 students from Huda Sharawy preparatory school, 47 students from 25 January preparatory school, 44 students from Mahatet El- kahraba preparatory school and 45 students El-Shaheed Ahmed Hamdy preparatory school for Girls.

Selection criteria:

- Preparatory school students in selected classes from 1st grade
- Both sexes
- Accept to participate in the study

Tools of data collection:

Data were collected by using the following tools:

1- Socio-demographic characteristics questionnaire:

This questionnaire was used and developed by researcher after reviewing national and international related literature. The aim of the questionnaire was to assess preparatory school student's socio demographic data such as age, sex, family size, order of birth and level of father's and mother's education.

2- Aggression questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992)

The aggression questionnaire consisted of 29 items divided into 4 domains, physical aggression (9 items), verbal aggression (5 items), anger (7 items) and hostility (8 items). Each item was scored on 5 points scale 1 = extremely uncharacteristic of me, 2 = somewhat uncharacteristic of me, 3 = neither uncharacteristic nor characteristic of me, 4 = somewhat characteristic of me and 5 = extremely characteristic of me. The total score for aggression is the sum of the domains scores.

Domain	Range	Low < 60	Moderate 60-< 80%	High ≥ 80%
Physical aggression	9-45	9-26	27-35	36-45
Verbal aggression	5-25	5-14	15-19	20-25
Anger	7-35	7-20	21-27	28-35
Hostility	8-40	8-23	24-31	32-40
Total	29-145	29-86	87-115	116-145

Two questions were reversely scored; "I am an even-tempered person" & "I can think of no good reason for ever hitting a person".

3- Assertiveness Formative Questionnaire (Erickson & Noonan, 2018):

The assertiveness formative questionnaire was designed to measure student's proficiency in the two essential components of assertiveness, which are:

1. Even when it's difficult, express my wants, needs, and thoughts (13 items).
2. Even when it's difficult, respect what others want, need, and think (7 items).

Each item was scored on 5 points scale 1 = not very like me, 2 = rarely like me, 3 = like me to some extent, 4 = often like me and 5 = very like me. The total score for assertiveness is the sum of the subscales scores.

Subscale	Range	Nonassertive < 60%	Average assertiveness 60-< 80%	High assertiveness ≥ 80%
Express subscale	13-65	13-38	39-51	52-65
Respect subscale	7-35	7-20	21-27	28-35
Total	20-100	20-59	60-79	80-100

Some items were reversely scored as "I often have a hard time saying "No.", "when an argument is over, I often wish I would have said what was really on my mind", "I tend to just go along with what everyone else wants instead of stating my own thoughts", "I sometimes avoid asking questions for fear of sounding stupid", "I tend to bottle up my emotions rather than talk about my feelings" and "I have a hard time controlling my emotions when I disagree with someone".

The assertiveness formative questionnaire was found to be moderately reliable (20 items; $\alpha = .733$). The express subscale consisted of 13 items ($\alpha = .747$), and the respect subscale consisted of 7 items ($\alpha = .682$).

II. Operational Design:

The operational design included preparatory phase, pilot study, field work ethical considerations and limitation of the study.

Preparatory Phase

This phase started with a review of current and past, national and international related literature and theoretical knowledge of various aspects of the study by using books, articles, internet periodicals and magazines to develop tools for data collection and the training program for students.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on 10% of the total study sample (17 students) of the total students from 1st grade preparatory schools in El-Masara district, In order to ensure reliability, clarity of questions and applicability of the tools, the time needed to complete the tools and perform the required modifications according to the available resources. Subjects who shared in the pilot study were excluded from the main study sample. The time needed to fill out the tools was about 15 to 25 minutes.

Field Work:

The actual field work started within first semesters of the academic year (2021-2022) in the beginning of October 2021. The researcher attended the schools two days per week (Tuesdays and Wednesdays) for data collecting.

The study took about 6 months for data collecting. The researcher divided the study sample into 4 groups according to class capacity. Groups include one class from Huda Sharawy preparatory school including 40 students, one class from 25 January preparatory school including 47 students, one class from Mahatet El- kahraba preparatory school including 44 students and one class from El-Shaheed Ahmed Hamdy preparatory school for girls including 45 students.

The researcher met the students at Huda Sharawy preparatory school on Tuesdays from 09:00 – 10:00 am in school computer lab and at El-Shaheed Ahmed Hamdy preparatory school from 11:00 – 12:00 pm at student class. Also, the researcher met students at 25 January preparatory school on Wednesday from 09:00 – 10:00 am at student class and students from Mahatet El- kahraba preparatory school from 11:00 – 12:00.

Ethical Considerations

- Ethical approval obtained from the Scientific Ethical Committee in faculty of nursing -Helwan University.
- The researcher assured for every selected student involved in the study sample, that participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason.
- The researcher assured confidentiality of data for every student involved in the study sample by using codes to identify participants instead of names.
- The researcher clarified that all information would be used for scientific research and for the students' benefits.

III. Administrative Design:

The study facilitation letter to conduct the study was received from the Department of postgraduate studies at faculty of nursing - Helwan University to the director of El-Masara Educational Administration. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and the methods of data collection for the study sample and asked for their cooperation.

IV. Statistical Design:

Data entry and statistical analysis were done using the statistical package for social science (SPSS), version 20. Statistical presentation and analysis of the present study was conducted, using the mean, standard deviation, unpaired student t-test, Pearson's correlation coefficient and chi-square tests. Data were presented using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages for qualitative variables. Qualitative categorical variables were compared using chi-square test while Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for detection of correlation between two quantitative variables in one group. Statistical significance was considered at p-value <0.05; while highly significant was considered at p-value $p > 0.00$

Results

Table (1): illustrates that (81.3%) of the studied students' age ranged from 12-13 years was with a mean \pm SD of 12.71 ± 0.764 . Regarding their gender, female's distribution was (69.3%). The order of the studied students between their siblings was the first (34.1%) and the second (32.9%). (49.4%) of the studied students had good school performance and 59.7% of the studied students weren't playing sports.

Table (2) clarifies that (82.4%) of the students' fathers and (84.1%) of their mothers were educated and fathers who were working (96.6%), while, mothers who weren't working (61.4%). The family size of studied students that ranged from 3-5 was (57.4%) with a mean \pm SD 5.14 ± 1.54 , 69.3% of them had normal crowding index and 72.7 % of them reported that their family income was enough

Table (3) shows that (62.5%), (45.5%) and (76.2%) of the studied students have mild level of physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility respectively. Regarding the high level of aggression, (8%), (11.4%), (13.6%) and (1.1%) of them have high level of physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility respectively.

Table (4) reveals that the highest mean score of the studied students' total aggression was anger (21.67 ± 6.58), followed by verbal aggression ($15.204 + 4.017$) while, the lowest mean score was hostility (20.562 ± 5.59).

Figure (1) illustrates that (62.5%) of the studied students have mild level of total aggression. While, (4%) of them have high level of total aggression.

Table (5) shows that (44.3%) of the studied students are nonassertive in relation to expressing wants, needs and thoughts, while, only (4.5%) of them are highly assertive. Regarding respecting others, (46%) of the studied students are nonassertive, while, (22.2%) of them are highly assertive.

Table (6) reveals that the highest mean score of the studied students' total assertiveness was respecting others (20.84 ± 7.67) while, the lowest mean score was expressing wants, needs and thoughts (37.96 ± 10.14).

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Figure (2) illustrates that (47.2%) of the studied students are nonassertive. While, (43.2%) of the studied students have average assertiveness and (9.6%) of them have high assertiveness.

Table (7): reveals that there is a statistically significant correlation between total aggression of studied students and their total assertiveness scores with p value (0.004*).

Table (1): Number and percentage distribution of the studied students according to their socio-demographic characteristics (n=176).

Personal information	N	%
Age		
< 12 years	3	1.7
12-13 years	143	81.3
>13 years	30	17.0
Mean± SD 12.71± 0.764		
Gender		
Boys	54	30.7
Girls	122	69.3
Order between siblings		
First	60	34.1
Second	58	32.9
Third	37	21.1
More than third	21	11.9
School performance		
Good	87	49.4
Average	86	48.9
Poor	3	1.7
Playing sports		
Yes	71	40.3
No	105	59.7

Table (2): Number and percentage distribution of the studied students' parents according to their socio-demographic characteristics (n=176).

Personal information	N	%
Father's education		
Educated	145	82.4
Uneducated	31	17.6
Mother's education		
Educated	148	84.1
Uneducated	28	15.9
Father's job		
Working	170	96.6
Not working	6	3.4
Mother's job		
Working	68	38.6
Not working	108	61.4
Number of family members		
3-5	101	57.4
6-8	72	40.9
≥ 9	3	1.7
Mean ± SD 5.14 ± 1.54		
Crowding index (number of family members/ number of rooms)		
Two or less (Normal)	122	69.3
More than two (Crowded)	54	30.7

Family income		
Enough	128	72.7
Not enough	48	27.3

Table (3): Description of the studied students regarding their total aggression scores (n=176).

Total	Low		Moderate		High	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Physical aggression	110	62.5	52	29.5	14	8.0
Verbal aggression	80	45.5	76	43.1	20	11.4
Anger	80	45.5	72	40.9	24	13.6
Hostility	134	76.2	40	22.7	2	1.1

Table (4): Mean scores of the studied students regarding their total aggression scores (n=176).

Total	Mean ± SD	Percentage	Rank
Physical aggression	23.97 ± 7.151	69.1	3
Verbal aggression	15.204 ± 4.017	76.8	2
Anger	21.67 ± 6.58	80.7	1
Hostility	20.562 ± 5.59	65.3	4

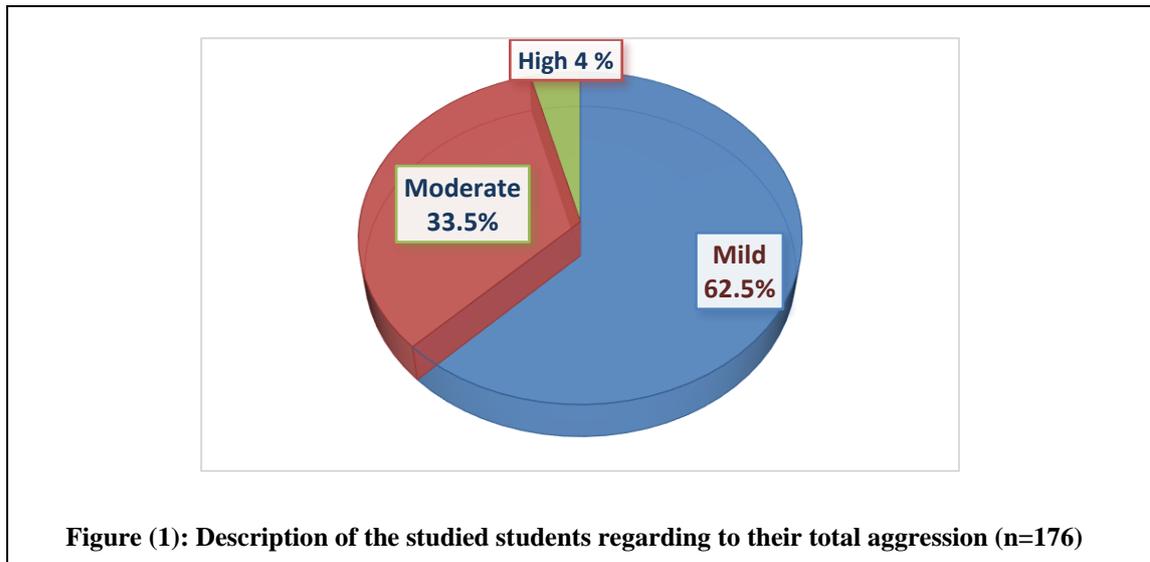


Table (5): Description of the studied students regarding their total assertiveness scores (n=176).

Total	Nonassertive		Average assertiveness		High assertiveness	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Express wants, needs and thoughts	78	44.3	90	51.1	8	4.5
Respect others	81	46.0	56	31.8	39	22.2

Table (6): Mean scores of the studied students regarding their total assertiveness scores (n=176).

Total	Mean ± SD	Percentage	Rank
Express wants, needs and thoughts	37.96 ± 10.14	73.8	2
Respect others	20.84 ± 7.67	81.1	1

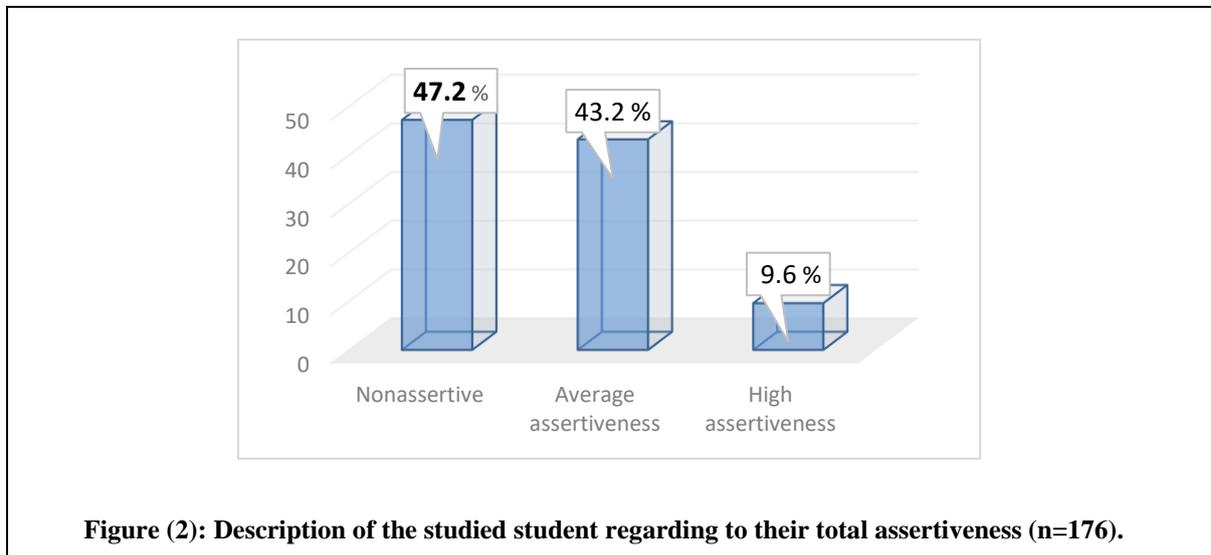


Figure (2): Description of the studied student regarding to their total assertiveness (n=176).

Table (7): Correlation between total aggression of studied students and their total assertiveness (n=176).

Items	Total aggression	
	Pearson Correlation	P- Value
Total assertiveness	0.213	0.004*

*Significant at $p \leq 0.05$

**Highly significant at $p \leq 0.001$

Not significant at $p > 0.05$

Discussion

The current study results revealed that the majority of the studied students' age ranged from 12-13 years with a mean \pm SD of 12.71 ± 0.764 . This finding might be due to the age of the students at the first preparatory year is ranged from 12-13 years after having six years of primary education. This result was congruent with **Assaf et al., (2018)** who reported about "Assessment of aggressive behavior among preparatory school children in Tanta city, Egypt" and found that the studied students from preparatory schools aged from 12 to 15 years.

The present study results represented that more than two thirds of the studied students were girls. This finding might be due to the number of girls preparatory schools affiliated to El Massara educational administrations were more than boys and mixed schools. This result was in agreement with **Badamas, (2022)**, who studied "Causes and preventive measures of aggressive behavior among in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis: Stakeholders' Perception" and reported that more than half of the respondents were female. While, this finding disagreed with **Avşar, & Alkaya, (2017)**, whose study found "The effectiveness of assertiveness training for school-aged children on bullying and assertiveness level" and mentioned that more than half of the students were male.

The current study results revealed that more than one third of the students were the 1st between siblings. This finding might be due to the family focus on the first sibling to be model for the other siblings. This result disagreed with **Saad et al., (2021)** who studied "Effect of play intervention on aggression behavior and social skills among elementary school children" and mentioned that the minority of the studied school children were the first among their sibling.

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The present study results clarified that nearly half of the studied students had good school performance. This finding might be due to the majority of the students' fathers and mothers were educated and they were motivating their children to achieve higher school performance. This result was congruent with **Ali, & Mohamed, (2020)**, who studied "Assertiveness training to improve self-esteem among school-age children with speech and language disorders" reported stated that more than half of the children had superior educational level.

The current study results reported that more than half of the studied students weren't playing sports. This finding may be related to more than two thirds of the students were females and playing sports is usually most common among male than female. This result was in the same line with **Choudhary et al., (2022)**, who studied "Aggression, self-esteem, and resilience among children: A school-based cross sectional study from central India" and stated that more than half of the study participants didn't enjoy watching/playing sports. On the other hand, this result was incongruent with **Elmasry et al., (2016)**, who studied "Physical and verbal aggression among adolescent school students in Sharkia, Egypt: prevalence and risk factors" and reported that the majority of the participants were playing sports.

The current study results illustrated that the majority of the students' fathers and mothers were educated. This finding might be due to presenting social development and increasing rate of education. This result was congruent with **Keskin et al., (2018)**, who studied "Reviewing assertiveness level of elite male and female athletes in different sports branches" and mentioned that all of participants' fathers and mothers were educated. While, this result was inconsistent with **Niyogi et al., (2020)**, whose study found "Relationship between emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and assertiveness among South Indian youth" and reported that less than half of their fathers and mothers had only primary school education.

Additionally the current study results illustrated that the most of the students' fathers were working; this finding might be due to family needs that require financial support and the fathers' responsibility to satisfy these needs. This result agreed with **Sabra & Hassan, (2020)**, who studied "Role of perceived social support on self-esteem and aggression among adolescents" and found that all of the participants' fathers were employed. While, **Ayhan & Oz, (2021)** who studied "Effect of assertiveness training on the nursing students' assertiveness and self-esteem levels: Application of hybrid education in covid 19 pandemic" stated that less than two fifths of the students' fathers were working.

In the same context, nearly two thirds of the mothers weren't working. This can be due to the most of the students' fathers were working and the family income was enough for the majority of them. This result was consistent with **Niyogi et al., (2020)**, who reported that the majority of the studied youth's mothers were homemakers. While, this result disagreed with **El Sayed et al., (2022)**, who studied "Aggressive behavior and psychosocial adjustment among port said university adolescent students" and reported that more than half of the students' mothers were working.

The present study results reported that slightly more than half of the students' family size ranged from 3-5 and more than two thirds of them had normal crowding index. This finding might be due to the direction of most of the Egyptians to have small size families. This result was dissimilar to **Saad et al., (2021)** who stated that two thirds of the participants had 5-7 members and about half of them had crowding index.

The current study results illustrated that nearly three quarters of the studied students reported that their family income was enough. This finding might be due to the most of the students' fathers were working. This result was in agreement with **El Sayed et al., (2022)**, who reported that the highest percentage of the studied students had enough income. Contrawise, this result disagreed with **Sabra & Hassan, (2020)**, who mentioned that less than half of the students' families had enough income.

The current study results reported that nearly two thirds, less than half and the majority of the studied students had mild level of physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility respectively. This finding agreed with **Choudhary et al., (2022)**, who found that the prevalence of physical aggression, verbal aggression anger and hostility was nearly half among children. While, these results were inconsistent with **Elmasry et al., (2016)**, who stated that less than two fifths of the students showed mild degree of physical aggression.

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The present study results clarified that regarding mean score of the studied students' total aggression, the highest mean score was anger, followed by verbal aggression, while, the lowest mean score was hostility. This result was inconsistent with **El Sayed et al., (2022)**, who reported that the highest mean score was for physical aggression followed by anger. Whereas the lowest mean score was related to verbal aggression.

The present study results clarified that nearly two thirds of the studied students had mild level of total aggression, while the minority of them had high level of total aggression. This result disagreed with **Ali, & Mohamed, (2020)**, who found that less than two fifths of the children had reported partially aggressive. As well, **Sabra, & Hassan, (2020)** reported that only less than third of the studied subjects had low level of aggression.

The present study demonstrated that less than half of the studied students were nonassertive in relation to expressing wants, needs and thoughts and respecting others. This result was similar to **Sitota, (2018)**, who studied "Assertiveness and academic achievement motivation of adolescent students in selected secondary schools of Harari people's regional state, Ethiopia" and stated that the observed mean score of students' level of assertiveness was low and far below the expected mean score.

This study results showed that the highest mean score of the studied students' total assertiveness was respecting others, while, the lowest mean score was expressing wants, needs and thoughts. This finding was in the same line with **Ata, & Ahmed, (2018)** who studied "Effect of Assertiveness Training Program on Nurse Interns' Self-esteem and Stress at El-Fayoum University Hospitals" and reported that spontaneous expression of feelings domain of assertiveness was the second highest mean.

The study results demonstrated that regarding the studied students' total assertiveness scores, less than half of the studied students were nonassertive and had average assertiveness. This finding disagreed with **Niyogi, et al (2020)**, whose study reflected that the majority of the participants were moderately assertive.

The present study results revealed that there was a statistically significant correlation between total aggression of studied students and their total assertiveness scores. This could be due to people who lack assertive skills have the less social adjustment in interaction with others. When they fail in their interactions, they react aggressively. This finding agreed with **Ebrahem et al., (2022)**, whose study indicated that there was a statically significant negative correlation between assertiveness skills and total aggression.

Conclusion:

From the results of the present study it could be concluded that:

Nearly two thirds of the studied students had mild level of total aggression while, the minority of them had high level of aggression. Less than half of the studied students were nonassertive and had average assertiveness. There was a statistically significant correlation between total aggression of studied students and their assertiveness.

Recommendations:

- Applying assertiveness training program to help students differentiate between assertion and aggression, change their negative attitudes and improve self-confidence.
- Educational and counseling programs for supporting needs of adolescent especially aggression and assertiveness.
- Psychiatric mental health nurse should encourage adolescents to negotiate their emotions and problems with supportive ones in the family for mental health and avoidance of aggression.

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